

Codman (G. T.)

THE PRACTICAL LIFE OF THE DENTIST.

ADDRESS

BEFORE THE

Massachusetts Dental Society

AT ITS

NINTH ANNUAL MEETING,

DECEMBER 11, 1873.


BY JOHN T. CODMAN, D.M.D.

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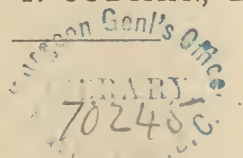
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THE traditions of many nations place the first inhabitants of our earth in a garden, where, amid eternal verdure, the music of birds, and the flow of waters, they watched the flowers of spring budding on their stalks, they tasted the gifts of the young luxuriousness of summer, and revelled amid the abundant richness of the fruits and harvests of autumn. If there existed a cold and dreary winter, we heard not of it. If it was necessary to hoard some of nature's gifts for sustenance, we heard not of it. In the vista of time, a portion of its traditions are evidently lost.

So uniform are these legends that they seem born out of the heart of nature, and carry with them the primitive analogies of life. With them we can analyze all the employments of life, for each occupation has its seasons as distinct as those of nature,—its dim outgrowings; its feeble attempts at life; its germination at all points; its great changes; its beauty, and its budding; its richness of fruit, and the fulfilment of its destiny.

To-day we talk of Dentistry. The familiar faces gather around, once more, as they have year by year, as one after another from our ranks is called upon to speak for a short hour of its possibilities and its duties. With gratitude to you for this privilege, I have found no trouble in want of material to fill the time, but some difficulty in choosing a

few from the thousand thoughts that arise, worthy to weave a holiday garment for this honored occasion; and should they, when so woven, make a sombre garb, we must bear in mind that in this country, at least, our professional garments shade towards the raven.

A few glances at the practical life of our profession as it now exists, a photographing of some of its familiar features for present and future reference, is all my appointed task for to-day.

Dentistry may be truly called minor surgery. It is not as grand as the technical surgery of to-day. It is not as grand as the denominated "practical medicine," though belonging to both of these branches of the healing art. The responsibility for life is not as often in the dentist's hands. The great and many excitements and anxieties that surround surgery and general medicine cannot be truly said to belong to the dental art. It corresponds to the minor key in nature and music. It has not the grand dash of the incoming sparkling wave, but more the plaint of the outgoing surge. There is a monotone of grief in it. It deals with decay and minor miseries. It works with human bodies tender and trembling. It works on high-wrought, exciting, and aching tissues and nerves. It is primarily the same to-day, to-morrow, and the next day. Its music is a great deal on the same string, pitched a little higher on one day, and lower the next. It vibrates its tone in the dentist's head, heart, and mind; and although he is the harpist, he cannot vary much the tune. It alters him mentally, physically, morally. He estimates life and humanity by it. With it, he is unable to soar to great heights. He is bound, siren-like, to its strange music. He alone can hear and understand its harmony, amid its uncouth noises; and it seems to him at times, as though he must follow it, lead where it may.

But he did not always follow. There was a time when he sat at the feet of some great teacher, — to him great, — and wondered at his manipulations, and his artistic shapings, and felt himself in the presence of genius, wishing he could do, and believing in his ability, and hoping for the day to come when he could shape these things of a grace equal to his master. This was the early spring of dentistry to him. These were but the first green sprouts that were springing from the soil, tender and pretty, to grow, perhaps, if the soil is deep enough, into something grand and useful, — possibly into a noble forest or field monarch, that shall shelter and bless the noblest of the land by its inviting influences.

Passing now rapidly to the age when launched from office or college out into professional life; when the dentist commences for himself, — alone by himself; can I put it in better phrase than by saying "to paddle his own canoe"? The attempts at success, — the groping in the dark, — trying to balance oneself against a want of knowledge, and practically the many, many upsettings that one gets before he can perform the valiant feat of guiding his paltry craft amid the turbulent waters of professional life, is, looking backward, either laughable or pitiable.

It will not be possible in so short a time as is allowed me to-day to attempt to follow out the experience of our profession; neither do I propose to follow thoroughly any individual life; but an attempt will be made to give a sketch of the dentistry of to-day, drawing not from fancy, but from experience and knowledge gained by long contact with dentistry and dentists, and with an earnest endeavor to show the true relation of dentistry to society, to the dentist, and that heterogeneous mass of humanity we call the public.

The question is often asked, How do dentists begin

their occupations? To-day I think we can say that the college and the hospital practice is the way that the largest number in our country commence. It is the only true way; and the future dental lights of our profession will certainly be graduates.

Shall I here draw a picture of early professional life? Were it not that it has been done so often and so well, I would try, — try to give you a glimpse of the long days of waiting; of hope deferred; of promises made and relied on only to be broken; of the first successes; of the first failures; of the long days of disgust at your own want of successful treating of what would bring means of comfort, fortune you think; of the most remarkable failure to do in a given time one half you proposed to yourself, nay, you felt sure you could accomplish. But while you meditate, some one comes. Is it possible that so important a personage as Mr. — could have sought me out?

Strange it is that the young dentist is trusted with the important matter of extracting a tooth, when the operation may disarrange the articulation of the whole remaining teeth; when it may be one of the most difficult of all dental operations; when many, shall I say a majority of persons, hesitate longer about the operation than any in dentistry! Yet most dentists of the present day owe a great deal of their early practice to the appreciative person or persons who, by accident or by strong suffering, came into their offices to have an offending tooth removed. It stands as the type of the early dental period, when the enthusiasm of the professional magnifies the small fee he gets into a substantial reward for services rendered and time expended.

I do not propose to overdraw the picture. To some the rewards come early in all professions; but to-day, in dentistry, as in medicine and in law, the vast majority

must wait long, even for fair remuneration for their services.

I am describing the dentistry of to-day ; and it will not do to point to a few men, patriarchs of the profession, who began when this century was younger by more than forty years ; when dentistry also was one of the new-born wonders ; when a few had a monopoly of the best methods, and the most intelligent and wealthy patients went only to them, — to point to them, and to the exceptionally fortunate few, as examples of the mean, professional award, or to the average professional honors conferred ; but to the dental rank and file, enough in this city alone to fill the ranks of two military companies (175), whose recompense is so small, and whose fame is so little, that the tax-gatherer is the only man who is acquainted with them all ; not that many or some of them may not receive all the honors or fees they deserve, but that the profession as a body is not by any means overpaid, but underpaid.

Exceptions are taken by a few, that all those claiming to be dentists are not properly so classed ; but I take the ground that all operating as dentists have a right to be included in a general statement like the one I have made.

It is a noted fact that few persons have any tender feelings towards the dentist ; any spontaneous gush of deep gratitude like that which springs out towards the family physician when a loved one arises from a bed of sickness, and he pronounces the magic words, "Going to get well." Or when the little child, that seems a tie between earth and heaven, lies on its bed with throbbing temples and flushed cheek, and the mother's mind is filled with dark imaginings, because of those who have gone before — dreams of scarlet fever, of some prevailing epidemic, frightens propriety from her, the calm words of the physician assures her it is only a temporary trouble. Or even

when that face is associated with the dead, who died in spite of medical aid, thoughts tender and true come of the dear physician who did his best to cure, though he failed of cure.

Equally true it is that the face of the clergyman brings joy, though mixed with the saddest events; thanks for the dear words spoken when the heart was rent by death; for the words of warning when the oldest boy was influenced by bad councils; and for the Christian spirit infused at all times by the immortal words spoken by the Great Teacher, poured from his lips into our hearts. But for the dentist what words of comfort — to the tired worker, to the conscientious, painstaking, ever-patient dentist, bearing daily, hourly, the burden and the crosses of others, trying to keep down the vexation and the nervousness of his patients, when inwardly he is holding his own nerves and his own vexation with an iron bridle, doing double duty.

However grateful any one may feel intellectually to the dentist for his services, the spontaneous thoughts that give rise to such tender feelings and kindly relations with other professions do not arise with the thoughts of the dental office, with its little instruments of steel, and its associations. In vain it is to say that the dentist is not responsible; that you visit his office for the very satisfaction gotten; and that he, personally, is unexceptionable in character and modesty. The *fact* is inseparable from his position, and is important to be noticed. How many times it is that some amiable aunt comes home late to dinner from having visited the dentist. With a volubility increased by the excitement and the damming up of conversation by the "persuasive" napkins of the morning's operations, she launches forth into a tirade of exclamations at the horrid time she has had, — "perfectly agonizing" is one of her choice phrases. We wonder how any one

likes to dwell on such subjects; but strange it is, all the contrivances the dentist has invented to perfect his art have to be commented on, — the "horrid" file, the burr, the thing that twirls round, — whilst Young America, with his ears, eyes, and mouth open, makes his first vow of disloyalty, and forms impressions of dislike in his young mind that years can only efface. Why, the little things come to us trembling all over with apprehension from the babbling tales they have heard.

These things should not be. The dentist should be looked on as a benefactor, the conservator of pain. He should be consulted in trouble many times when he is only consulted in extremities. "I have put off coming to you as *long* as I *could*," is a common saying. "I am sorry, for if you had come sooner I would have saved you much pain, and have saved you from an inevitable loss," is a common answer.

So often has the tale of the sufferings and "anguish" of having a tooth filled been told at the family table, it seems a wonder to me that no one has given the other side, — the suffering of the family dentist in trying to preserve the teeth of Miss Fullnerves from decay and destruction.

There is no more common or a simpler cavity, generally speaking, than that in the crown of an under molar. I will try to put on paper the daily experience in filling such a cavity. I will not exaggerate, as you will all bear witness.

The preliminary examination discloses the fact that Miss Fullnerves is, as her name indicates, blessed with an abundance of nervous power, but nine tenths of it is undoubtedly misdirected. With her veil over her face she desires to know if you can fill a tooth for her. She condescends to lift her veil to show the tooth, but you must first agree not to touch the tooth. She announces to you the fact

that she is extremely nervous — something you had found out at first sight; and with a question as to how much time it will take, makes an appointment steering clear of her party days and the dressmaker, and goes home to dread the day when she shall come again. Oftentimes it is more of a dread on the part of the dentist, — the expectation of what he will be obliged to accomplish, — and when he meets his patient with a smile on his face, a smile of assurance, it is for her benefit, and not his own cheerfulness beaming out.

Seating his patient in his chair, he cuts carefully away the overhanging edges of enamel that cover a little cavern or cavity, and discloses the decay beneath. At every touch of the chisel, the moisture fills the cavity. Constantly wiping it out, he now follows with little excavators around the edges inside of the cavity, cutting out portions of decay carefully; for if he goes too deep, he may wake up the occupant and cause severe pain, — that is what Miss Fullnerves directs "to be careful," and as a consequence he must do the same thing again and yet again, for the emotion of his patient continually misleads him. Now clean the bottom of the cavity amid exclamations that "You are touching the nerve" and "Isn't that enough" and "Don't do that any more," — bribes offered to the dentist to be unfaithful.

Does the lady know that if so little decay is left that it might lie in the corner of her eye, and not create discomfort, it will be too much? Does she know if that which might rest on the point of a cambric needle is too much if it is left in the cavity? Ah, woe, if the promise is made that the work is most accomplished, for some black streak of decay goes deeper and deeper into the hard enamel and seems to defy drill and burr and chisel, whilst the slippery moisture increases, dulls the sight, and annoys the

operator; for now will be flung at him the promise he made her that it was most done. But enough of this; it is finally accomplished, and the little bits of gold tell that the second part is to commence.

What is now the problem? To change these loose, paper-like rolls or bits of gold into a solid lump or filling that shall stay forever in moisture, and as long keep it out of the cavity; that shall stand the action of heat and cold; that can be chewed on by the power of muscles and teeth; that can perhaps crack a walnut, — a Yankee walnut, — and it must not give way, but last in the mouth, that ever keeps going, as the French say (*bouche va toujours*), to the entire satisfaction of the wearer.

If at first the labor and strain were divided, the dentist now takes the laboring oar. He estimates his pieces; they must not be too large, they must not be too small. If too large, they are clumsy, and perhaps cannot be used; if too small, they consume too much time in their insertion, and endanger the filling getting flooded. Every instrument must be in its place; paper or cotton wads to dry with; small cloths to insert in the mouth, folded to right shape and size. If we cannot use the rubber cloth, we commence perhaps by placing a bit of linen under the tongue, and a small fold of another piece next the cheek, under severe protestations from Miss Fullnerves, that she is choking to death.

The tongue is an unruly member. If any one disbelieves it, ask his dentist. Please to put out your tongue, Lift it up, are summonses that seem easy, but how many fail to accomplish it; and, instead of putting it forward to relieve the throat, it is drawn down, choking and stopping the easy play of the muscles of the throat in swallowing. Soon the little glands that cover the interior of the throat and mouth begin to flood the throat with mucus and

saliva, and the patient feels a disposition to swallow, and the cloths are pushed out of place in the attempt. Immediately the glands under the tongue, relieved a moment from their pressure of the cloth, pour out their abundant fluid. Readjust the cloth. If the mouth is very wet, commence again with new ones.

Now prepared, we remove the wads from the tooth and dry the cavity with paper. Wipe it once, twice, thrice. The patient does not like it, but it can't be helped, and so "Keep as quiet as you can" is the word. Now insert one of those bright golden pellets, carry it home with a true eye and a steady hand. No, the patient has moved simply in anticipation of hurt; never mind, go on. One, two, three, four. You have done well. Ah, what is this! So soon. The tide is rising; the cloth is wet; it must be removed. Carefully tuck one end of a dry one *in*; draw *out* the wet one. String out, O slippery saliva! We have changed it. Go on. More gold and harder pressure, — hand or mallet. Ah, your patient is getting fagged. She moves her feet with tremulous motion, and your work is dancing monotonously before your eyes. It is very unpleasant. Shall you ask your patient to stop? If you do, she will likely do something worse. She must stop! It is endurable no longer. Please stop! She minds, — what a relief! We have got most through, — this we say to encourage ourself. Now the muscles of the jaw are tired. We must hold them. Now change the cloth. Hold the jaw and cloth with one hand. Pick up the gold and pack it with the other. It is getting warm now, and the back aches from the stooping position. The hands are beginning to feel cramped, for it takes considerable power to hold the muscles of the mouth firmly and steadily.

Now pack fast, and with a steady hand, as we are near the edges of the cavity; for if we make a single slip all

will be up. Smaller pieces, and smaller; the tide is rising; we cannot change the cloth again; we must finish now. How many bits it takes to finish. The hands are more cramped; the left hand feels as large as an elephant's foot. The right hand and arm is tired. The breath of the patient strikes upon the eyes and blurs the sight. You hold in your breath, close your mouth and breathe through the nostrils. Ah, it is wet above, wet below, wet at the sides. Everything is wet. The fingers are wet; everything but the filling. Is that wet? not yet; and one more piece will finish. The tooth has now become a little island of gold and ivory. Is the filling wet? So insidious is the moisture it is difficult to tell; yes — no, not yet. The last piece is in. One rub of the burnisher around the edges, and out — all out with the cloths. Close your mouth. Now for a good long breath. Was I holding my breath all that time? I did not know it. Now use burr and file and burnisher and polisher, to finish with, all simple, but less exhaustive, and the work is done; and Miss Fullnerves returns to the family circle with her side of this story, the offset of mine never before told, I think, in public.

I have thus presented to you only a simple case of filling, but almost daily are there complicated cases, — cases of over-sensitive and excitable persons who desire to have work done properly, and are not willing to fulfil the conditions by which it is made available for the dentist to do it. They stand before a door which they ask you to open, and then practically defy you to do it, and blame you if you in any degree fail.

You are often asked if you can, and quite as often do, fill cavities you are unable to see by looking at the reflection of them in a mirror. You must bend over and bear the weight of your body on one foot, stooping forward and looking upward, holding the powerful muscles of the

mouth with one hand, and with the other hand carry instrument and gold with the utmost delicacy of manipulation. You must do this when exhausted by calls, overwork, or by the accidents of daily life; whether it suits you or not; whether it rains or shines, bright day or dull. You must hasten to make up lost time; to be ready for the next patient, who is prompt, and exacts promptness of you, or must be gone to meet engagements or a train of cars; and you cannot, if you would, stop in the middle of an operation for meals, even though the young demon of dyspepsia might thereby be strangled in its birth.

If any man does these things day by day, is it a wonder that when he leaves his office at night he looks pale and anæmic? Is it a wonder that he is spiritless, and lets the issues of the day go by without his voice being heard in the land?

I say to any young man, if you will be a dentist, if you will sacrifice yourself to this profession,— for it is a sacrifice,— you must be a dentist and naught else. It is a profession which will bind you to itself with chains tighter and closer day by day and year by year, making your circle of influence more and more professional, but less heroic and less manly. Not less manly in its strict sense, it is true; but in our furnace-heated houses, treading in slippers on carpeted floors, with the nerves always high-strung, with the voice pitched to subdued tones, carefully tending our digits as a mother her ten children, it seems to me sometimes, and it will yet seem to you, that the rugged shoot of manhood was nearly lost; and instead of meeting bravely the northwest gale, I pray that the “winds of heaven visit *me* not too roughly.”

But the time comes when the professional life of the dentist is in its summer; when it is full of promises of a rich autumn. Some of its signs are these: He remem-

bers when patients came to his office with profound questions for him to answer. He remembers that Mr. Blank and Mr. Starr plied him with questions about his specialty. He did not then think they were quizzing him to find out his merits; far from it; he thought they were passing the time in pleasant conversation with him. He now knows better.

An elegant lady comes to him now. Her name is unfamiliar. She asks no questions. She desires his services without question. She makes appointments for her children, her husband and sister. There is something in this that touches him. It is the *confidence* bestowed in him. He knows such confidence comes not without knowledge. He knows that some kind heart has spoken some true word of him. The day is fair. The little monitor rings gayly and often. The hours fly by quickly in the interest of his occupation. What he has not done to-day he expects to do to-morrow. True, there are some vexations; some severe trials; some misfits; but who has seen a summer without a shower,—some violent thunder-storm, but passing away soon, and leaving the morrow more fresh and beautiful? The night's sleep is refreshing. Once in a while the dream is of the anxious care of the morrow—of how to do some coming task. With employment enough to live easily and comfortably; with professional knowledge enough to carry the burden of labor lightly; with bright eyes and a clear head,—if this is not the summer-time of Dentistry, I know not when that time is.

I would the members of our profession could appreciate, and could each one know, when the summer is on them, and act then so that the autumn will find them prepared for its duties. I am afraid that too many of them let it pass by with bickerings and small jealousies and attempts to

outdo each other, instead of favoring good-will and the brotherly grasp of friendship, and its leisure moments spend in idleness and novel-reading; while only a few wiser ones devote themselves to developing new facts, to dental books and societies, and to that constant, appreciative study of instruments, modes, and appliances that make a few fit only to be leaders in our growing profession.

How softly and quietly the summer glides into the autumn! A few bright-hued leaves in the dark-green forests prematurely colored; fountains and brooks, dried by summer heat, begin to refill with water; dewy evenings and gorgeous mornings, and *something accomplished*,— *the weeds gone to seed*, the corn *growing ripe*; the long days of planting, of cultivation and care; anxious waiting for dry weather; anxious waiting for rain. To watch the young tree grow from seed; to graft it; to wait years to see it blossom, and at last to be covered with fruit; to enjoy the hour when it shall be in its first glory is beautiful, but how measurably short is the harvest, compared with all these years of toil and waiting, — an *hour*, an *half hour*; a few shakes, and all the golden fruit falls. Have we learned this lesson of Nature's?

It has rained, and the dentist has enjoyed some days of comparative quiet. He wonders if any scandal is afloat concerning him, or if there is any new competitor, it is so very quiet; when, as though by one accord, an avalanche comes upon him. It seems as though the genius of dental misery and separation was abroad. He busily plies his occupation. He remembers his growing family, but he remembers also that he is their support. He is invited, urged, coaxed to do more than is prudent. He thinks it is but a shower, and he yields. Days move on. Little monitors — pains in the back, dull, heavy feelings about the

head. Slight pains in the eyeballs, and the noontide glare warn him. But the heat of the battle is on. He tries to turn the current that flows heavily on him. This, he says, is my assistant; he is competent; go to him. I am tired, exhausted. "It is *you* I want" — the dentist's *personal services*.

The rewards of dentistry are for *personal services*. It is well to keep this in mind. When the power to render personal services is ended, the dentist's occupation is gone. His advice may be of use, but, unlike the physician, it is in little demand without his labor and service also. It is for *personal service*. He may possibly have one or two assistants or mechanics in his employ. Not often have dentists over one, and a majority are without any.

However competent to direct he may be, how able to command, he has no company of laborers to grind out small particles of wealth for him, making a large aggregate. He cannot, like an able mechanic, employ a dozen or more gangs of men or laborers to aid him to competence. Unlike the merchant, there are no lucky days for him, when trade has prospered; when one hundred or one thousand or five thousand dollars are earned, turning the balance for a whole year; but toil, limited in fees, by circumstances, and the amount of excessive spine-work.

Let me here answer a charge made, I have no doubt, in good faith, by those in mercantile pursuits, against our specialty. Said a gentleman of my acquaintance, speaking in reference to some of our dentists who command higher fees than formerly, "You are looked on by downtown merchants as extortionists." I answer that the groundwork of trade and a liberal profession is totally different; and can easily see that the one cannot comprehend the other. Trade, as trade, is progressive. The professions are progressive, but unfortunately for a right

understanding of each other, they are travelling farther and farther apart. By the conditions of present society, the generality of merchants are driven by competition to smaller and smaller profits; and only by large sales and great activity can they realize the rewards of former times.

They feel it just that the same principles should be applied to dentistry and the professions. But dentistry is progressive in another way. The dentistry of the past generation would not answer for the present one. The half hour spent years ago in filling a tooth "*in the best manner*" is duplicated by an hour and a half or more, and continued operations of three to ten hours are not uncommon. The tooth that was once thrown into the spittoon is now gold crowned, and sits a king among its peers. The "few wires" and a "hog-hook" or key instrument that was once the fit-out of a dentist, is now only laughable.

If any one desires to know how dentistry was practised here in former times, let him visit some obscure country-village dentist. A lady of my acquaintance who did so, informed me that on asking the operator where she should empty her mouth, was told, "Out of the window."

Now many of our establishments are elegantly furnished. We have operating chairs, and cabinets, the cheapest of them costing a hundred dollars or more. We have gas apparatus, and constantly new instruments and appliances; burring engines, and predictions of electrical and galvanic power; condensed gas in iron cylinders that would kill on bursting, as sure as the bursting of a cannon; and our specialty is alive with something new every day. We pause as women at a fair. One half or three quarters of the new inventions we are solicited to buy are

either useless, or are soon superseded by something more worthy. Shall we buy, or wait for others to try if these inventions are useful? Who demands of us the best appliances? Those who come to us — our patients. Shall we be too modest to ask a fee that will allow us to make these important changes and trials, when they are more specially for our patients' benefit?

It is true that well-furnished rooms are not necessary to good dentistry, neither is a fine store or counting-house necessary to a merchant; but the dentist, as well as the merchant, knows that the public on whom he leans, judges by appearances, and when the question is asked, What sort of a tradesman or dentist such a man is, the invariable answer is, "They have a fine store or office."

That seems to speak of prosperity; and if it takes the last penny, many will sacrifice it to meet this sort of demand. Add to these the increased cost of family living; the heavy rents; and then think that these demands must come out of personal services, not commencing with the skylark at dawn, but at a late hour of the morning, and closing, if physical ability can hold out, by limitation, when the afternoon light fades.

We have some men in our specialty who are extortionists, either by habit or by will. Those I denounce, — men who get patients into their offices as in a trap, and then spring it upon them. I remember with pleasure seeing some years ago in an office the following notice: "Free consultation about fees is desirable." There should be no misunderstanding between dentist and patient. The patient should not be too modest to ask, and the dentist should be always ready to announce his fee.

But I was speaking of the autumn. It comes. Patients forget the years of poor pay; of lost life; and now, in the full flush of success, with more patients than time to work

for them, with appointment book filled, and no stray hours, can the dentist afford to sell the time that remains, before the winter of bleared eyes and shaky hands sets in, for the remuneration of the spring-time? I think not, and the public ought so to think.

What comes in the autumn? Less care and toil. Every dentist who believes in progress, and who observes the facts in dental practice, will, I think, do less work in a given time the more years he operates. Do I mean to say he grows less skilful? By no means. Does he work slower? By no means. What then? He puts more labor in a given operation. Finding by experience how deadly insinuate the destructive agents of the mouth are, and how his best operations are sometimes failures, he knows no way to guard against this except by more care, more sureness, more nicety of operation, and more precaution in every way.

In his professional summer he took some poor, deformed specimen of humanity with a "whopper jaw," and made a presentable or even beautiful face of it, by re-arranging or placing the teeth where symmetry demanded they should be placed. Perhaps that face gave its owner fortune, or, better, a life-long protector, a happy home, with beautiful children; but it gave the dentist a deal of trouble, and finally much satisfaction; and, if it followed the usual rule, but little "substantial" reward. Like the lame dog who had his leg set, it brought more lame dogs through the summer and late into the autumn, with some reward, it is true, but with much perplexity.

Having heard that you pleased Mrs. Figgitt with a set of artificial teeth, says a lady, and having tried six of the best dentists in the city, I have come to see if you can fit me with a set. A great compliment to you, truly, but prepare yourself to be the seventh martyr.

This is the season of all when patients are "horridly punctual." Scolded at, if a few minutes behind time, by looks, if not by voice. With his calls, labor, and interruptions, the nervous strain is particularly great. Even the rainy day, when his plans suggested partial rest, is a godsend to some who are "so glad to see he is not busy, and can wait on them." Teeth, nerves, appointments, aches, ether, fits and misfits! He seems to eat, drink, and sleep dentistry.

Mothers want their six-year-old "sonneys," whom they have never controlled for ten minutes, to come to us and have the delight of having their teeth cut, scraped, bored; their mouths gently jammed with napkins; their gold gently put in, with all the strength of a stout man,—some even think we press lightly to make gold solid for a boy's tooth, and hard for a man's tooth,—they want us to put their children through two hours of torture, and make them behave and obey us,—and, we have to do it. We hold them in purgatory with heavenly promises; but, alas for the depravity of a boy's nature, those promises are oftentimes not half enough.

Difficult as the operations of dentistry are, and I claim that they are among the most difficult performed, it is more difficult to control impatient children than to do the rest of the labor.

It is said that the late Rufus Choate was once congratulated on his success. "Success!" he replied; "do you know what that means? It means care, anxiety, sleepless nights, overwork, dyspepsia, biliousness, loss of appetite, and weariness of spirit. That is to be a successful man." Every successful dentist of to-day will tell you there is a deal of truth in his remarks.

And now shall I tell you of the winter of our profes-

sional life? Shall I not be spared this, as the old legends were? Shall I not leave it out of the tale? What more pitiful sight than to see an old man dimly peering through his eyeglasses, his hands trembling, trying in his old age to make up the reward he should have earned years before, knowing he cannot do as well as he could, or ought to do, with youth, competition, and vigor pressing on behind him, and those whom he cherished by professional attachment, — an attachment none but professional men can know; an attachment which grows from friendship towards the fair face or manly form to blessings on all that surround them; that follows them from the office as the door closes behind them, to their homes; that wishes them well; that rejoices with their honors, and mourns their losses, — all unknown to them, perhaps all unexpressed.

We here to-day know what it means, when, some deed of valor performed, some great honor earned, one of us rejoicingly exclaims: "He was one of my patients." I say, when these cherished patients come no more to us, one by one fall away like leaves, leaving the great branches of our professional life barren and bare to its wintry winds, there is a touching sadness about it, and more so, if the professional life has not been fairly rewarded.

Do we like our profession? Does the physician like to hear the groans of the sick and dying? Does he love to be with the weak, the complaining, and the debilitated? Does he like to be called from his warm bed into the chilly night air? Does he like to hear the same old tales dinned into his ear of misery, disappointment, and sickness, and to break young hearts, by announcing that the fatal stroke has been driven into a parent's bosom? And

do we like to live, tormenting day by day, seraping the sensitive bones of our kindred? Do we like to live in an atmosphere of nervousness, with all sorts of people fussing and fuming, and fretting our lives out of us; tearing, wrenching the bones from their sockets, when necessary; drilling, boring, pounding; coaxing, urging, driving persons to do what they desire to have done, and seeing pleasant faces only when they get through their appointments? I answer no. I won't allude to the sickening ether business to-day.

But, says one, you get your pay — your money; and I think you intimate, if you don't say so, that the medical profession is better paid than you. That is your reward. Had I called a physieian to my sick wife or child, and found his interest in their sickness was only for the fee he expected from me, I would spurn him. The door of my house would close on him once — the last time. There would be such a feeling of utter contempt for him, that if he encountered it, his soul would shake like his unclothed body in the presence of a polar iceburg.

And if I carried his fee to him, whatever its amount, and flung it down, saying, There's your pay, and that is all I care for you, I hope he will show me out of *his* front-door, and expedite my going.

When I carry to a professional man his money, may every one of the *greenbacks* be broken with the weight of my sense of obligation to him; may they be covered all over with wishes for his progress, — his success, — with encouraging words. If he has done his whole duty, may I not say *paid* to him, but — take these; these are only the *promises*, the *pay* comes from a higher power.

Ours is a young profession. Forty years ago, the learned men of New England, the able lawyers, the wisest

men, had doubts of the ability of dentists to preserve their teeth. Those doubts have passed away. Faith in the service of dentistry has constantly increased, until now, when we can proudly say that we can, to a large average, save the natural teeth by filling. How do we know this? We know by the fact that among the class of people who have made a habit of attending to their teeth, the demand for artificial substitutes is small, in comparison to twenty years ago. In fact, so much so, that in many cases that source of income to the dentist is almost entirely cut off.

The claims of other professions have long been urged upon the public. Where are our lawyers? In our presidential chairs, — unless some military hero sits there; guardians of our treasury, filling our senatorial seats, and monopolizing a large portion of the official stations of honor and trust. Success go with them. Where are our clergy? Where they can urge their own claims. We were pleased when, a short time ago, an able and successful minister took his seat in the State Legislature. We did not hear that he neglected his parishioners. It has been that dentists have occupied minor political positions, and with honor I believe; but, if you ask where you must look for the successful dentist, I answer, in his operating room or office. Now I say it unhesitatingly, and I know you will approve it, that the same devotion, the same energy of body and brain, the same talent and ingenuity we apply to our profession, if applied in other professional ranks, or in trade, will, as a rule, give us a better financial reward, and a more important position in the eye of the public, and, I believe, longer life.

That we are thus hemmed in on all sides; that we cannot step from our office doors except at unseasonable

hours, without some injustice to our patients; that we cannot accept important office, or break from the woful monotony of the details of our profession; that we must narrow or devote our lives to this duty, — belittles us in public estimation, not as dentists, but as able *men*; and I for one cannot forget that I am first a man, and dentist afterward.

The man in mercantile life who “rushes things” is the successful man; but the dentist who rushes along, does it at the expense of his patient’s comfort, and plainly at the expense of his teeth; for no man is properly a dentist who has not the spirit of high art in him, — who is not, in fact, an artist. I have for years wondered at the shameful neglect of members of our profession to approximate the natural color of lost teeth in their artificial substitutes. At last I think I have found the key, in the fact that many of them must be color-blind, and cannot distinguish different shades, or they would not, for their honor, place such unseemly imitations in human mouths.

But I must leave much unsaid. I cannot have presented to you many new facts. You are familiar with all I have presented. I have tried to bring together into small compass the straggling ends of our professional life, and present them to you, so that you can review, as in a moment, the prominent traits of our active profession. If I have dwelt somewhat on its disadvantages, it is because its advantages are so easily seen and acknowledged: its absence from great exposures; its little need of money-capital; its general cleanliness; and the fair position it gives a man,—something better than that of an ordinary mechanic, and approximating to that of a physician.

These conditions are seen and acknowledged by all; but they are so patent that a crowd of adventurers push into our ranks without proper preparation, and to the injury of the public and ourselves.

As the difficulties of our profession become to be better known; as its slight rewards for its best operators in proportion to what the best in other professions receive are known, it will pass from the hands of the most skilful into mediocrity. Able men will see other professions, trades, and occupation that tempt to greater profit; to less trying physieal and nervous labor, and to greater honor; but it lies with the great public to say whether our ranks shall be filled with the ablest of the land or with adventurers. We have established our colleges. We have urged up the standard of professional excellence, and done what we could to promote progress in the right direction; but to make us a great profession, — great not only in name but in the individuals of which it is composed, — we must have a generous reward; not simply paying our bills, which may in individual instances be a burden, but must have those other tokens of remembrance and loyalty that shall induce men of character and purity and kindness to join with us, so that mothers can trust their little ones in our hands, knowing with absolute certainty that their innocent thoughts will not be contaminated, and the unpleasant duties we have to do will be done with gentlest hands.

There is a reward that comes when the snows of winter are laid on our foreheads; that comes not to many who the world says have prospered. It is the consciousness of having passed a *useful life*. Supposing that to-morrow some magnetic rock, like the one in Sinbad's story, should draw at once every bit of gold from the teeth and every artificial tooth from the mouths of this community. What think you? Would it not take its place among the great calamities by fire and flood? and were the fee for its return ten times its original cost, how many think you would desire to neglect it? In view of this fact, there must be reserved in the corner of the dentist's heart, some room amid personal sorrows and unrewarded efforts, if thus his

lot should be, for gratulation, for hope that some unseen eye shall yet fully reward him. Let him therefore live to elevate himself and his occupation, so that as he approaches the end of his life journey, he may exclaim, —

“It is not *all* of life to live, nor *all* of death to die.”

